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C.I.A. Reportedly Recruited Blacks For Surveillance of Panther Party

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

The Central Intelligence Agency recruited American blacks in the late 1960's and early 1970's to spy on members of the Black Panther Party both in the United States and in Africa, according to former high-level officials of the agency who have first-hand knowledge of the operations.

Details of these clandestine activities were considered among the agency's most sensitive and closely held information, the sources said, partly because of fears that disclosures about the program would arouse public accusations of racism in the intelligence agency.

Only in the most oblique references did any of the inquiries in recent years into C.I.A. activities ever uncover the program of black spying.

At least some specific information about the C.I.A.'s spying was provided to the 1975 Rockefeller Commission, and later to the Senate intelligence committee in their inquiries into illegal C.I.A. activities, but those investigating groups did not include any specific mention of the recruitment and use of American blacks in their subsequent public reports.

The activities of the black agents ranged from the following and photographing of suspected Black Panther Party members in the United States to the infiltration of Panther groups in Africa. One agent managed to gain access to the personal overseas living quarters of Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther leader who set up a headquarters in Algeria in the late 1960's.

In its final report, the Rockefeller Commission, a panel appointed by President Ford to investigate charges of C.I.A. abuses, concluded that the agency's spying in this country exceeded its authority. The overseas efforts to link the Black Panther operations to foreign influence theoretically was proper, the commission said, although much of the material in the C.I.A.'s files "was not directly related to the question of the existence of foreign connections."

The Rockefeller Commission subse-

quently recommended that the C.I.A. be directed not to perform "what are essentially internal security tasks," in the United States or elsewhere.

The Senate intelligence committee, which will soon begin public hearings into the proposed new charter for the intelligence community, has recommended that the C.I.A. be compelled to obtain a warrant before conducting any wiretaps or surveillance of American citizens living abroad.

C.I.A. officials have said repeatedly that the goal of the agency's domestic spying program was to determine whether antiwar activists and black extremists were being financed and directed by Communist governments. Agency officials have declined to discuss the programs further.

One longtime C.I.A. operative with direct knowledge of the spying said, however, that there was an additional goal in the case of the Black Panthers living abroad: to "neutralize" them; "to try and get them in trouble with local authorities wherever they could." Just how successful the C.I.A. was in those alleged activities could not be determined.

In his memoirs, "Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA," some of whose details were published Tuesday in The New York Times, William E. Colby, former Director of Central Intelligence, acknowledges that he was unable to learn all there was to know about the C.I.A.'s domestic spying operations.

One man who had first-hand knowledge of the operation said, "If they had gotten exposed, then it would have been the C.I.A. versus the Black Panthers and all black Americans—they've had a lot of Americans against them. The agency would have been exposed, open to attack."

"For all my efforts," Mr. Colby wrote, "I found it impossible to do much about righting whatever was wrong" with the domestic spying programs. "Its supersecrecy and extreme compartmentation," he added, "kept me very much on its periphery."

In his memoir, Mr. Colby did not mention the spying by blacks on the Black Panther Party.

In interviews over the last two months, former staff investigators for the Rockefeller commission and the Senate committee were asked why their final reports did not discuss the use of black Americans. The former staff members disagreed widely over who had been told what—inevitably raising questions about the efficacy and thoroughness of the investigations.

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C.I.A.'s spying on blacks. Most staff members, however, firmly denied that there had been such spying.

"If that's the case, I'm astonished," one investigator for the Rockefeller Commission said when informed of the use of American blacks. "If it were so, it's something I didn't know about and I'd have to say I'd feel I'd been deceived."

A Senator who took a leading role in the committee's C.I.A. investigation also said he knew of the use of blacks domestically. But he said, "I think you're pretty accurate in saying that we were not told of the use of American blacks overseas. I never heard anything."

A former high-level C.I.A. official who was directly involved in the Senate investigation said he was not surprised to learn that some senior Senate officials did not know of the use of black agents.

'An Adversary Proceeding'

"They didn't ask," the former C.I.A. official said. "We treated the Senate inquiry as an adversary proceeding. It wasn't a show and tell program. Had they asked, we would have dug out the answers."

"There must be a dozen comparable situations going on," he said. "The fact is, no one asked."

"I think it's important for the public to understand that this was an adversary proceeding," he said. "It was up to the committee to ask. They were running the investigation."

"And that's why the Hill is such a poor place to resolve these issues. The Senate intelligence committee was very divided. Its chairman [Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho] was running for President and the minority and majority staffs were divided and playing games."

Two Major Programs

The Times's sources said that the C.I.A. conducted at least two major programs involving the use of American blacks when the Panthers, organized by young blacks in the mid-60's, were publicly advocating revolutionary change.